

XII. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#7: Missional Clarity and Church Multiplication”
Selected Texts
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In this study we will be looking at missional clarity and church multiplication as the last distinctive of a Gospel healthy church, a spiritually vital church and a church that knows the presence and power of the Lord. This will be the last study on the Gospel healthy church. While this last distinctive may seem like a given, it's not. It's not a given because one of the things that is always evident is that Satan always wants to get the church off its mission and off of its message. Satan does this in a variety of ways. Sometimes he does this by an outright attack upon Biblical truth or Biblical orthodox which is what we call right believing which should lead us to right action.

You have to have doctrine to have doxology, devotion and discipline but you can have doctrine and not know the Lord. But you can't know the Lord without doctrine. Churches can get off track when Satan either gives them a false message or he adulterates a true message of the Gospel. One way he adulterates the message is to misdirect the church on its mission because after a period of time the mission of a church will eventually affect its message that it preaches. So it's important that we get our mission right in order to maintain our message. It's obvious that it works the other way as well where the message enables us to do the mission but if we get off of the mission then we will eventually get off of the message. Then we will begin to engage in ministry that is no longer effective for the Kingdom of God.

So in this study I would like to give you some things on missional clarity and then healthy church multiplication. Let's start by looking in Acts 1. Some of you might have thought I would have started in Matthew 28 when talking about the mission of the church and that is the Great Commission but you can also find it succinctly stated in the last chapter of John, in the Gospel of Mark and in Luke. There are five places in which the encapsulation of the mission of the church can be found with clarity and some differences, not contradictory differences but enhancing differences, to understand. I chose this one in Acts for two reasons. One is I want you to see it in the content of it and two is I want to stay in the book of Acts for this study to draw out a number of things for you.

Acts 1:4-5 says [4] *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; [5] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* So Jesus wants them to wait in Jerusalem because there is something that He has ordained to occur. That is, He is going to mark out God the Father's fulfillment of the New Covenant promise to pour out His Spirit upon His covenant people. It doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit wasn't working in the Old Testament. It does mean is that there will be clarity of revelation and clarity of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the New Covenant.

Why? It is because the Holy Spirit will come from Jesus. The same Holy Spirit that was with Jesus in His life and ministry now is poured out from Jesus enthroned in victory of His redeeming work out upon us. That's why Paul beginning in Romans 8 loves to call the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant, the Spirit of Christ. The same Spirit that was with Jesus from His

birth all the way to the throne is the same Spirit that is with us at our new birth all the way to glory. So Jesus is wanting the Disciples to wait as this is accomplished.

How is it accomplished? Jesus does it. You are not baptized by the Spirit, you are baptized by Jesus with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a baptizer. The Holy Spirit is that One with whom you are baptized. The baptizer is Jesus. He baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit and He will baptize those who are not His people with the fire of everlasting judgment. So Jesus will pour forth His Spirit on that Sunday which is Pentecost. Pentecost happens 50 days after Jesus' ascension and that is what some Christians were called, '50 Day Christians' because it was the work of the Spirit of God that enables us to know Christ and follow Him.

Acts 1:6-11 says [6] *So when they had **come together**, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* [7] *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.* [8] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* [9] *And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

The phrase 'come together' means they assembled as a church. So there is a church in Jerusalem. It is a phrase used in preparation of the Lord's Supper. This phrase is the signification of the church meeting. It can meet in an Upper Room, a house or a designed sanctuary but when the church comes together that makes the church. Presbyterians used to call churches the meeting house rather than church because the church was the people, the meeting house was where the church met and where we would meet the Lord together.

Their question about restoring the kingdom of Israel had to do with them wanting to know if Israel was going to continue to be the theocracy where it would reign within one nation and He tells them that is God's doing but that their mission is once they receive the power from the Spirit they are to engage in the mission He had already given to them. The mission is to go and make disciples of all the nations. The evidence of them being Spirit filled is not any one gift of the Spirit but you will begin to make much of Christ.

You will be My witnesses. There is the Spirit filled church bearing witness of Christ and they will begin in Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria and the utter most part of the world. So Jesus begins to affirm the way He gave the Great Commission in the Gospel of Luke. Think of being witnesses as concentric circles where you start in your own city, then your own nation and then to the world.

I'd like for you to consider looking at the Great Commission differently in this study. In Acts 8 through 11 we see how the Gospel goes from Jerusalem who is under persecution then to Judea. Then a big deal is made when it goes to Samaria. Could you use Samaria to talk about a geographical region? Yes and we see that the book of Acts focuses on the city of Samaria which was the provincial capital the Samaria area as well as what was called Judea.

I bring that out because I believe there is a strategy that Jesus has embedded that the Gospel goes from nation to nation to nation but it seems that God is pointing out where in the Bible that man expressed his rebellion against God after the curse of the sin. Man expressed his rebellion against God by establishing a city. God made us and He made us for gardens but when he rebelled he established a city and the city was used to erect the city state as the religion of the

day with the tower of Babel in that city that rose up. God came down not to visit them with multiple languages to bring redemption but to bring judgment, to scatter them from that city.

In the New Covenant the Holy Spirit is coming to give us the ability to speak the languages of all the nations so that we can then take the Gospel to all the nations. The cities become not the exclusive target but the primary target – Jerusalem, which is the capital of Judea. Then the Gospel goes to the city of Samaria which is the capital of the region of Samaria. Then the Gospel goes to the utter most part of the world on mission. In 25 years it has gone all the way to the continent of Europe. I don't know where it went south and east but I just know it went north and west as it got to Europe.

If I follow the tracking of the Gospel in the book of Acts we find Paul going to cities to reach the countryside. Interestingly, of the 28 cities that are referenced only two of them are capitals. In other words, they go right to the seat of power – the intellectual power of Athens, the political power of Rome, the power of the city of Samaria. Paul went to various provincial capitals where you would find enclaves of Roman soldiers and authority structures such as Philippi. They would take the Gospel with the weapon of the Spirit right into those places. I do believe there is something to be said where the cities are not our exclusive targets but they are a target so that you begin to reach everything around them.

What man put together to rebel against God, God tells us to bring the goodness of the Gospel to the city. People quote to me often 'we're supposed to labor for the success of the city' and we are but not the success that is defined by the city. It is success defined by the mission and the message. That is the success that we labor for in bringing God's common grace of blessing and God's redeeming grace of transformation into the cities. So that is what happens in the book of Acts. If we were to track it all the way through we would find that mission clarity.

One of the problems we have in the evangelical church is not that we fall aside immediately and say to God 'we don't want Your message and Your mission but we'll come up with our own message and our own mission.' That's not the way it usually happens. It usually happens like this; whenever we do the mission there are blessings we usually enjoy seeing. People's lives are changed and people begin to see things differently. Economic landscapes are changed when the Gospel does it work. Families are ordered and developed which become foundational to the blessing of the culture. So there is personal and cultural transformation. We begin to see society become aware of injustices and beginning to address them.

What happens in the church very easily, is that those consequences because they are so wanted and desired sometimes become the mission. For instance, social justice that which ought to be dear to our heart and this is a consequential blessing if we do the Gospel right. But if we make it the mission, then before long we don't have a Gospel but a social gospel. Or people see themselves made in the image of God, redeemed by Christ and God put you as a steward over His creation. As people see that they begin to see themselves differently. So we see that self-respect as image bearers of God redeemed by the blood. Sometimes though it becomes the mission where the church is here for self-esteem and before long we no longer have a redeeming Gospel but a therapy Gospel where you feel better about yourself and not the Gospel that delivers from sin.

All these are blessed consequences but if they ever become the mission then they will redefine the message. That's the way previously healthy churches become unhealthy churches for they gradually take blessed consequences of staying on the mission and begin to make those the mission. After that is done then the message becomes adulterated. History is full of this and its ultimate expression is what we call liberalism.

I highly commend to you a book that I don't think will ever go out of date. The title of the book is Christianity and Liberalism by J. Gresham Machen. In it many think he makes an audacious statement but I think if anything it's a muted statement and it is a true statement. He says 'the greatest enemy of Christianity is not some of the cults, but liberalism.' It is because liberalism uses all of the same vocabulary that Biblical Christianity uses but it not only doesn't mean what Biblical Christianity means, it actually means the opposite. Man is not depraved and in need of a Savior, man is just a victim of his circumstances. In fact, what we have within in us is a lot of good that the Gospel message will draw out as they let people see who they really can be.

That is not what the Bible says. The Bible says in Romans 7:18, *[18] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* I'm not as evil as I could be and the only reason I'm not as evil as I could be is that God restrains me from being as evil as I would be. God has not come as a help-me-up, coach-me-up mission but God has come on a salvation mission to bring dead sinners to life. Now there is much good in me because He is in me and He is now restoring me to that which He created me to be. So liberalism actually eviscerates Biblical Christianity and the thing that makes it so pernicious is the fact that it uses our same vocabulary but doesn't mean the same thing.

What happens when you go to the cities with the mission? Let's look at one example of the Gospel going to a city in the missionary movement of the Apostle Paul as Paul, Timothy and Silas arrive at a very interesting place, Philippi, a provincial capital in Acts 16. Acts 16:11-15 says *[11] So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. [13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [15] And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."* And she prevailed upon us.

When Paul ministers in a city he goes to the Jew first and then to the Gentile but here it says they went outside to the riverside and that was because Philippi didn't have a synagogue and ritual cleansing was so important and running water. It didn't matter about the depth of the water it just had to have running water. So if there wasn't a synagogue you would find Jews gathered at appointed times for worship and cleansing near rivers, running waters. So Paul goes down to the riverside as he hears where Jews are gathering.

We also see this woman who has a household and clearly there is no man. Therefore she is responsible for her household. She is baptized along with her household. So here they have their first convert. She is likely a transient but likely has a business there. Let's continue in Acts 16.

Acts 16:16-18 says *[16] As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. [17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." [18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.*

Did you know that people can say the right things for the wrong reasons? This was not to life up Jesus and the way of salvation but this was for the purpose of confusion. This is how the demon had shifted tactics. Paul sees it and then deals with it. Let's continue.

Acts 16:19-24 says [19] *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. [20] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. [21] They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." [22] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

Do you remember the demoniac that delivered at the hand of Jesus (Mark 5)? Instead of saying something like "Praise the Lord!" they all said 'Get out of here! You're messing up the economy of sin.' Sin always has its industrious roots. Same here where they are going to try and stop Paul, Timothy and Silas after Paul cast the demon out of the woman who was making money for them.

The remains of this prison are still in Philippi and Lord willing I'll get to go back there again this fall. Let's find out what happens while their feet are fastened in those stocks. By the way, after all that has been done this far I would have had myself a huge pity party if I had been thrown in stocks after all this but not Paul and Silas. They have a praise service because they have a different view of God than many of us have under trial. They see the hand of a sovereign God and we're about to see how the hand of this sovereign God is working.

Acts 16:25-34 says [25] *About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." [29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. [34] Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.***

This jailer is about ready to kill himself to beat his bosses to the punch because the penalty for losing your prisoners in that day was death. They would take no excuses for if they lose them then the jailer loses his life. So he is ready to lose his life before he is put to death in a manner that he doesn't want to be put to death by the Roman authorities in this provincial capital city. Then he hears a voice that says 'we're all here.'

What I'm about to say is not a prophecy but if we had an earthquake here in this state and the jails and prisons broke open, what are the chances that everyone is going to stay in place? Human nature hasn't changed but here everyone is in place. Why? It is because of those hymns and psalms that have been quoted and sung. The light of the Gospel had been at work from midnight on. What kept them there was the very testimony of Christ and the impact that it was

making on those around them. It is very much like Joseph. He didn't have a pity party either and prisoners were amazed at him and came to him whenever they had an issue or question.

When the Philippian jailer said 'what must I do to be saved' that tells us what they had been singing about. Clearly they had been singing about the Gospel message and praise to the Lord who saves sinners so the Philippian jailer and his household were entered into the Kingdom. Now the Apostle Paul has his core group for a church at Philippi. There is a rich Jewish business woman (Lydia), a delivered demoniac/a slave girl (a Gentile), a Philippian jailer (Romans employee) and his household. That is not exactly carving out what would seemingly be the best of the bunch but what a core group! That's the work of the Gospel. Let's continue on in Acts 16.

Acts 16:35-40 says [35] *But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go."* [36] *And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace."* [37] *But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out."* [38] *The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens.* [39] *So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city.* [40] *So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.*

Paul points out to them how they violated their rights as Roman citizens and he tells them they have to affirm what they did wrong and not just dismiss them and cover this up. Some would read that and think Paul is getting back at them to teach them about Roman affairs and jurisdiction but I don't think that's what he is doing. He does this same thing about three different times in the book of Acts. I think he knows who is coming after him, meaning Christians in other cities, and while he does not have by any means the citizenship rights you and I have in this nation from this thing called the Bill of Rights, there were some rights that they had. He is not doing this to look after himself or doing it as a payback in vengeance but he is carving out what he can for the political rights of the church that will be there in Philippi.

They know the culture isn't going to change without the Gospel but they are going to step up in the matter of public policy because they were violating the constitution by putting a Christian out of business for the free practice of religion. Paul is carving out the space of the rights a citizen would have gathered for Christians as the Gospel is going to remain there with the church that has been planted there. So what can we learn from this? I'm going to give you five things we can see from this.

The first thing is that whenever the Gospel comes and you're on mission and on message as you come to an area through evangelism and discipleship, it is met with initial success. God sovereignly has a people prepared. When the Gospel comes people respond and you think it would be with a great response but what always happens is the evil empire strikes back. That is the second thing that happens. Persecution and hostility are brought upon those who are on mission and on message.

The third thing that happens is that God delivers His people in His sovereign way. He delivered Peter and John in Jerusalem. He delivered Paul here and He will deliver Paul in other places. Sometimes He'll deliver them through death into glory. Sometimes He'll deliver them through earthquakes, but God delivers His people. Then what happens?

Fourthly, they go right back into the city to stay on mission and on message as they renew their commitment to the mission and the message. Fifthly, they have even more success and end up planting a church – church multiplication.

In our culture right now we are talking a lot about church planting but what today we call church planting is most of the time, not church planting. It's not a healthy church reproducing another church but it's an unhealthy church subdividing or it's the next show in town that robs the smaller churches. I have watched this time and time again. To reproduce and multiply you have to be healthy. There is a reason why 70 year old women don't give birth. There is a reason they call it labor. So it's not an easy thing at all. Then to nurture a child with a mother's love is not an easy thing at all. To give birth to another church is not an easy thing. The church that does it needs to be Gospel healthy and spiritually vital to give birth. That is church multiplication and not church subdivision or sheep stealing from churches that are struggling.

I had a man come to me once and say 'I've come to plant a church but don't worry I'm not coming after your people.' I said 'Well, if you can't steal a couple of people then you're probably not very good anyway and I'm sure something will happen anyway, but I'll be praying for you.' He said 'I just wanted you to know and we may do some cross pollinating but I'm here to reach the unchurched.' I saw the ad for the first Sunday of this new church and it said 'Remember when you're church used to be fun? Come to our church. We do have fun.' That doesn't sound like it is aimed at unchurched people. It sounds like it is aimed at disaffected church people and I think it's a giveaway. My point is not sour grapes. I've been through this before but my point is that it is not the way the Bible teaches for us to do it.

Healthy churches are churches that are growing, like the one in Jerusalem and it spins off another church at Antioch. Antioch spins off another church and that is the way it happens. Healthy churches are reproducing. Now can God take a dying church, pull some people out and plant a new church? Yes, but that is God doing something very special to rescue people and that's fine. But we ought to be thinking about church multiplication. How can we keep multiplying churches? I'm going to be very particular and pointed now.

I rejoice in the fact that I pastor a church and am in a presbytery. I rejoice in the fact that there are 15 Presbyterian churches within 10 miles of the church I pastor and there are a lot of healthy Southern Baptist churches and Independent churches. I praise God for that and I actually think it's God's hand of blessings that started back in the revivals that happened here in the 1960s under two or three key men, not the least of which is our own Dr Frank Barker. Instead of some disaffected people starting a church why don't we go to some of the tough places in our city and then carve out reproduced churches out of a healthy manner to place them in those places.

Why is church planting so important? It is because the most effective evangelists are either new Christians or people involved in church plants. That is just statistically affirmed. So as we fulfill the Great Commission we follow to go to those key areas and then you plant a church that can reproduce other churches in the tougher areas because it's a healthy church to engage in it.

Where did Paul, Timothy and Silas come from? They came from a healthy church that reproduces churches all over the Middle East, Europe and what today is Turkey. That church is Antioch. Acts 11:19-26 says *[19] Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. [20] Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.*

[21] The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

[22] News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

[23] When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. [24] He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

[25] Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, [26] and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

We take Christian as a prescriptive statement but back then, actually the word Christian was a descriptive statement of unbelievers concerning the way the believers were living, like little Christs – Christ followers. So the Lord is blessing, the church is growing and becoming robust. Barnabas feels the need to have an associate pastor and gets Saul of Tarsus and mentors him. Then the two of them get so blessed that they start calling the disciples Christ followers. That is what happens at Antioch and it just keeps growing. Now let's look at Acts 13.

Acts 13:1-3 says *[1] Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. [2] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." [3] So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

As they are sent off multiplication of churches happen as they stay on mission and on message in city after city after city. There are five leaders in that church at Antioch and none of them are from Antioch. All five have been given to them by the hand of God's providence. What did they do? They took arguably the best two and sent them out. That's a healthy church multiplying. It was a church that was founded because everybody stayed on mission and on message and planted a healthy church from a healthy church. It was Jerusalem that was undergoing persecution. Now they are not under persecution they just have a very small mission's conference where they will have two missionaries they will send out. They sent out the guys that God had blessed so much in their ministry there in this last year and then they go out city to city multiplying churches staying on mission and on message.

I'm going to ask you to pray that God will allow us to be a Gospel healthy church on mission on message in ministry, four ministries – our ministry to God in worship, our ministry to the world in evangelism, our ministry to one another in loving one another and our ministry of discipleship that people are growing deeper in their walk with the Lord that they might spread further the Gospel of our Lord. As God does that we will continue to be a part of God's strategy of church multiplication and where churches were once multiplied by healthy church planting are now in a state of a loss of vitality, maybe because of spiritual disease, plateaued, no longer making an impact so that we'll also have church revitalization to come back in so that those churches won't just subdivide but will become healthy to reproduce themselves again and again and again.

Jesus really did answer their question. I'm not going back to one nation for this Kingdom is going to go to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and the utter most part of the world because I'm sending My people on a mission to make disciples through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, church revitalization, Gospel deeds and healthy Gospel leaders to be sent to all the nations and you will see a glorious Kingdom for all the nations. You'll see them as populating His Kingdom for God's glory and you will see Me

gathering them in as My people with Gospel vitality staying on mission on message and in ministry. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word and for the privilege and joy of studying Your Word. Thank You for what You have called us to be and to do for Christ our Savior so we give You praise for there is none like You. God, would You be at work in our church which is Your church that we might be healthy with national and international intentionality to multiply churches, revitalize unhealthy churches and make sure the mission of our Savior is embraced, the message of our Savior is proclaimed and the ministry of our Savior through the body of Christ will go to every nation in this world. Jesus, come quickly as You gather Your people to Yourself for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.